Late Summer Propagation: What Works Now and What to Wait On

Most backyard growers know spring is prime propagation season, but late August sits in an awkward gap. Some methods work well right now while others will fail or waste your time. Knowing which techniques to use in late summer and which to skip until fall saves you from losing cuttings, wasting materials, and missing the narrow windows that actually produce results. Here's what to propagate now, what to hold off on, and how to set yourself up for fall success.

What You Can Propagate Right Now

Late August is ideal for semi-hardwood cuttings of many landscape shrubs. Forsythia, weigela, deutzia, and spirea all root reliably when taken now. The stems have firmed up from spring's soft growth but haven't fully hardened like they will by October. Hydrangeas (both macrophylla and paniculata types) also root well from late summer cuttings. For evergreens, boxwood and most hollies can be propagated now through early September.

Take cuttings in early morning when stems are fully hydrated. Cut four to six inch sections just below a node, strip the lower leaves, and stick them in a well-draining medium like perlite or a 50/50 peat-perlite mix. Keep them misted and shaded for the first two weeks.

What to Wait On

Skip hardwood cuttings of deciduous plants right now. Those need to wait until the plants go fully dormant in late fall or winter. Trying to root dormant-type cuttings while plants are still actively growing just leads to rot. Also hold off on most perennials. Their energy is going into late season blooms or preparing for dormancy, so survival rates drop. Spring or early summer is better for perennial division and softwood cuttings.

Grafting is also poor timing in late August for most species. The bark is no longer slipping easily, and plants are slowing down their vascular activity as they prepare for fall.

September Setup Work

Use the next few weeks to prepare your overwintering space and potting up area. Any semi-hardwood cuttings you stick now will need to be potted by October and protected through winter. Clean out cold frames, check hoop house plastic for tears, and organize your potting bench. Order any rooting hormone, pots, or potting mix you'll need for fall. Having everything ready means you can pot up rooted cuttings quickly when they're ready, rather than scrambling or letting them sit too long in propagation trays.

If you want a complete system for turning backyard propagation into consistent side income, including propagation calendars, pricing guides, and marketing templates, see how Backyard Nurserymen works. It walks you through the entire process from cutting to sale.

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